THREE COMMENTS

M. D. Anderson

Capital Letters

In Vol. 5, No. 1, of The Indexer, Mr. G. Norman Knight discussed the use of capital letters in indexes and elsewhere, and asked for the views of other index-makers.

While on the one hand I agree with Mr. Knight and Mr. G. V. Carey in preferring more capitals than is now the fashion, and especially in wishing that they were used more consistently, on the other hand I hold with Mr. R. L. Collison that in indexes 'it is not essential to capitalize the initial letters of ordinary words'. Using capitals for proper names only tends to make it a trifle easier—and hence quicker—to identify the required reference, and this, to my mind, outweighs the 'dignity and finish' claimed by G.N.K. for indexes in which all main entries are capitalized. It is true that, as Mr. Collison says, the printer (or publisher's sub-editor) may insist on capitals for every entry, but in my experience the 'lower-case index' is often approved, or at any rate allowed to pass.

I might perhaps mention that the index to Vol. 4 of The Indexer, commended by G.N.K as having initial capitals, was made to accord with the indexes of previous volumes; such considerations have to be taken into account, as well as the personal preferences of the indexer.

The Length of Book Indexes

A member of the Society asked me to continue my study of the lengths of book indexes (Vol. 5, No. 1). The only new material I have collected is a little information about the lengths of indexes in recent technological and scientific books in some foreign languages.

German books were found to have indexes of much the same length as in English books of a similar kind; many of them were in the 6 to 8 per cent range, with one (on the technology of wood) as long as 11.5 per cent. There has been a marked increase in the length of the newer indexes as compared with those in older books.

French books often have no index, but rely on a detailed list of contents at the end, supported in many cases by a bibliography. Where an index was present, this was usually short—0.8 to 2.3 per cent; the two longest found (in books on bacterial lipids and on dairy technology) were 3.7 per cent and 3.9 per cent.

Italian books almost all had indexes; some were in the same range of length as those of many French books—1.3 to 2.1 per cent; others were longer—4.5 to 5.6 per cent, as were those of a pair of Spanish and Portuguese text-books on vegetable oils (4.9 per cent and 6.7 per cent).

Only two Russian books were found with alphabetical indexes; one (on colloid chemistry) reached 2.1 per cent; the other was of 'token' length. Several dozen other Russian books, like many French books, depended on lists of contents at the end, usually with bibliographies as well.

We may conclude from these preliminary figures that we are fortunate, both as indexers and as readers, in that publishers of books in the English language are more generous about indexes than those of some other countries.

* It may be recalled that these figures represent the number of lines in the index as a percentage of the number of lines in the book, counting a 2-column page of index with (say) 50 lines per column as if the lines ran across the page, i.e., as 50 lines.
Page Numbers

The symposium (Vol. 4, No. 4, of The Indexer) on the position of page numbers produced no consensus of opinion. Some analysis of the contributions may be attempted.

Putting the page numbers in the top outer corners of the pages was described as:

' the most natural and convenient place'
' the best position for reference'
' the most useful place'
' the most easily referred to'
' the best position'
' the best [position]'
' our normal practice . . . if the book has running headlines'
' usually the most sensible place'
'to be preferred [in a non-fiction book]' But seven of these nine contributors went on to say that for aesthetic or practical reasons some other position might be favoured. One went so far as to state that 'lively design is more important than ease of indexing and index reference', and another admitted that 'it is possible that on occasion [the designer] forgets that an index exists and is there to be used'. A tenth contributor objected to any limitation on freedom of design. An eleventh contributor was guardedly sympathetic with indexers and index-users: 'where a book is to be used for reference, and requires comprehensive indexing and cross-reference, it would be quite proper for the typographer responsible to consider this aspect of function as one of some importance, together with all the other factors which make a book pleasantly useful or irritatingly ornamental' (my italics).

The two remaining contributors upheld the bottom centre position for page numbers, and this was also 'the general practice' of another publisher.

A second point touched upon by most contributors was the tendency to omit the page number on the first page of each chapter. This for one contributor was 'an exasperation that should always be avoided'. Another said: 'I cannot think of any reason why page numbers should be omitted from the first page of each chapter'.

The rival school of thought held otherwise:

'[the omission] is surely not too great a handicap'
'in my opinion they are rightfully omitted'
'why should page numbers be especially needed at chapter openings?'

To this it may be replied that one often wants to refer to a particular chapter rather than a particular page, causing an especially large number of references to the first pages of chapters. It is interesting to note that the upholders of numbers at the foot of the page claim as an advantage that there is then no inclination to omit numbers from the first pages of chapters.

I recently indexed some school science books in which the number of the left-hand page was on the top outer corner, and that of the right-hand page on the top inner corner. I thought at the time that this manifestation of 'lively design' was unique, but I have since found another example in the attractive edition of Jane Austen's novels published by Martin Seeker in 1923, and an even more remarkable arrangement, with page numbers in both bottom inner corners, in Perseus in the Wind, by Freya Stark (John Murray, 1948). In novels and other books without indexes, page numbers are of little importance, and the designer may have his fling, but in a school book even a minor hindrance to ease of reference seems hard to justify. The indexer feels inclined to refer the typographical designer to the texts on the beauty of functionalism.

To return to the symposium: three contributors queried the view that the top outer corner is the traditional position for the page number, and that other positions are comparative innovations. My original statement to this effect was, I must admit, based on a general impression rather than a close study. I have now looked at a good number of books with this in mind, and my general impression is confirmed, with the proviso that the statement should be taken to apply to books that require indexes, and also that 'comparative innovation' is a term with different meanings for people of different ages.
With very few exceptions, books all through the 19th century had their page numbers in the top outer corners. The earliest examples I have found of numbers at the centre foot of the page were published in 1896—a volume of Osgood McIlwaine's edition of Hardy's novels, and a book of verse, all in capital letters, by Stephen Crane (Heinemann). Is it a coincidence that this date was not long after the foundation of the Arts and Crafts Society by William Morris and his friends, some of whom were particularly interested in typography? During the first years of the 20th century, numbering at the centre foot became more common, especially for books of poetry—perhaps because of the lack of running heads—but also for novels, books on art, and others showing evidence of rather self-conscious design. Numbering at the bottom outer corners appeared as an occasional variation. In books on what might be called more index-worthy subjects, there are practically no examples of numbering at the foot of the page until the 1920s, and it did not become at all prevalent until the 1950s.

Numbering in the top centre of the page is not as common as I thought. It is found in a few of the calf-bound books of the 18th century, sometimes with the figures in brackets, and sporadically up to the present day, but not often enough to enable any trend to be established.

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL FOR 1966-7

Officers and Council Members

The Council has to report that both the Chairman and Hon. Secretary have indicated their desire not to seek re-election for office on May 25th. The Council has accordingly nominated Mr. Richard Bancroft as Chairman, Mr. John L. Thornton as Vice-Chairman, Mr. John M. Shaftesley as Hon. Secretary, his daughter Mrs. H. A. Levin as Assistant Secretary and Mrs. M. D. Anderson as Hon. Treasurer and Membership Secretary. Of the two retiring Members of the Council, Miss D. F. Atkins has expressed a wish not to seek re-election. Mr. F. H. C. Tatham and Mr. C. R. Raper were nominated as Council Members.

Council Meetings

The Council held four regular meetings in June and October, 1966, and in January and March, 1967.

Membership

Total membership at the end of the financial year was 261, compared with 250 for the previous year, consisting of 222 Individual and 39 Institutional members. This increase was obtained in spite of a regrettable loss of 13 members who resigned for various reasons and 16 more members whose names have been struck off the Society's register for being in arrears with their subscriptions. However, on the credit side, the Council had the pleasure of electing thirty-four Individual and six Institutional members. This upward trend in membership is likely to continue if interest in the Society is maintained; for example, about 350 enquiries for information about it were received in a matter of a few weeks following the appearance of a small paragraph about the Society in a national newspaper in February.

BANKERS WITH BLINKERS

THE MERCHANT BANKERS by Joseph Wechsberg, 365 pp., no index (Weidenfeld & Nicolson) 42s.

In this manner the Jewish Observer and Middle East Review of January 20 starts its notice of the above book—only the conversion into bold type is ours. Such an 'early-warning' system seems sensible and (as a means of saving subsequent space) worthy of adoption by other reviewers.

G.N.K.